

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Repair of Yuma Cove Razorback Sucker Rearing Pond Environmental Assessment

September 2010

**Lake Mead National Recreation Area
Mohave County, Arizona**

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to repair the earthen berm at Yuma Cove that separates the backwater from Lake Mohave. The berm was rebuilt in 1999, nine years after its original construction, and has slowly eroded away due to wind and wave action. At the northern most end of the berm, the elevation has dropped approximately one foot and the crest width has narrowed to less than one foot. This repair is needed because razorback suckers, a federally endangered fish species, are grown in the backwater pond and require protection from non-native species found in Lake Mohave proper. If the berm is allowed to be compromised, the razorback suckers will fall prey to larger, non-native species in Lake Mohave.

One low-ground-pressure dozer, one front loader, and one 4X4 pickup with a 100 gallon fuel tank for refueling the heavy equipment must be transported to Yuma Cove to complete the repairs. Approximately 760 cubic yards of material will be moved during rebuild of the earthen berm. Three days of work with this equipment will be required to complete the repair. One day will be required to transport equipment to the work site, and one day will be required to transport equipment from the work site following project completion. A total of 5 days will be required to complete the project.

Since 1950, the historical high elevation of Lake Mohave has been 646.75 feet above means sea level. Once the repair is complete, the berm will have a crest width of 12 feet, a height of 5 feet, and a 3:1 slope, giving a base width of 42 feet. The lakeside toe of the berm will be 647 feet, and the crest height will be 652 feet (647 feet + 5 feet).

SELECTED ACTION

The selected action is the environmentally preferred alternative, which was identified and analyzed in the environmental assessment (EA) as Alternative B. No changes have been incorporated into the Selected Action as a result of public comment. Under the Selected Action, the heavy equipment (dozer, front loader, and pick-up truck with fuel tank) needed to complete the repair of the berm will be transported to Yuma Cove via a previously existing route that has since been restored. This route, which was used to do a similar project at Yuma Cove in 1999, leaves U.S. Highway 93 at Milepost 45 in Arizona and enters the park as Approved Road 38. From there it follows what was formerly the western-most road of the Desert Rose Subdivision,

an unfinished housing tract planned in the fifties and located on a private inholding that was eventually acquired by the park in 1973. The route then enters a wash that leads to Yuma Cove.

In 2006-2007, the Resource Management and Maintenance Divisions of Lake Mead National Recreation Area (NRA) restored the Desert Road Subdivision by ripping the roads, removing berms, replacing rocks and boulders, and replanting vegetation. Vertical mulch was used to hide access points to the subdivision from Approved Road 38. Under the Selected Action, one of the subdivision's roads will be used for equipment access. Restoration occurred on approximately 200 meters of this road, beginning from the point at which it leaves Approved Road 38. While it will not be necessary to re-blade the road, minor earthwork will be required in areas that have washed out to restore connectivity of the roadway sections, allowing the equipment to pass. Unless more preferable options become available in the future, this route will be retained for future administrative access to Yuma Cove as necessary, perhaps every 10 years, but there will be some restoration immediately following the berm repair to prevent unauthorized use of the route and additional impacts to the area.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT SELECTED

In addition to the Selected Action (Alternative B, Re-use of Restored Roads), the EA evaluated two other alternatives in detail: Alternative A, No Action, and Alternative C, Use of Approved Roads and Shoreline.

Alternative A, No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, the Yuma Cove backwater pond would not be repaired. Heavy equipment would not be brought to Yuma Cove. The berm separating the rearing pond from Lake Mohave would continue to be eroded by wave action. Eventually, this erosion would cause a breach and restore connectivity between the rearing pond and Lake Mohave. The loss of functionality of one razorback sucker rearing pond would reduce the number of razorback suckers that can be raised and released each year. Additionally, the rearing program would lose some of the redundancy provided by an increased number of rearing ponds. The No Action Alternative does not meet the project's purpose and need.

Alternative C, Use of Approved Roads and Shoreline: Under Alternative C, the necessary heavy equipment would be transported along approved roads until reaching the shoreline of Lake Mohave at Arizona Bay. From there, the equipment would travel north along the shoreline, below the lake's high-water line. Just south of Yuma Cove is a large bluff that would block equipment from accessing the backwater. A new route, approximately 500 meters in length, would have to be constructed up a wash and around the bluff; this new route would descend into the wash that leads to Yuma Cove (the same wash utilized under Alternative B). This alternative was not selected due to the greater resource impacts that would occur from equipment transport.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DISMISSED

The use of barges or helicranes to transport the heavy equipment from Cottonwood Cove (the closest launching point) to Yuma Cove was given preliminary consideration by NPS and Reclamation as a means of avoiding off-road ground transport and its associated impacts. However, no barges on Lakes Mead and Mohave are capable of transporting equipment of this

size. Transport of a barge from southern California is not practical and would require a crane for off-loading, which NPS and Reclamation cannot provide. Helicranes can lift a maximum of 25,000 pounds, and the weight of the equipment needed for this project exceeds 30,000 pounds and thus cannot be transported in this manner.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will promote the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as expressed in Section 101 of NEPA. This alternative will satisfy the following requirements:

- 1) Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- 2) Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- 3) Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable or unintended consequences;
- 4) Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- 5) Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and,
- 6) Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The Council on Environmental Quality states that the environmentally preferable alternative is "the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (46 FR 18026 – 46 FR 18038)." According to the National Park Service (NPS) NEPA Handbook (DO-12), through identification of the environmentally preferred alternative, the NPS decision-makers and the public are clearly faced with the relative merits of choices and must clearly state through the decision-making process the values and policies used in reaching final decisions.

The Selected Action, Alternative B in the EA, is the environmentally preferable alternative because overall it would best meet the requirements in Section 101 of NEPA. This alternative allows for the repair, and hence continued use of the razorback rearing pond, while minimizing resource impacts associated with access. As trustees of the environment, the federal agencies involved have a responsibility to promote the recovery of the endangered razorback sucker and to ensure the continued existence of a valuable natural resource for future generations. As such, Alternative B best achieves requirements 1, 2, and 4 above. The No Action Alternative (Alternative A) does not meet the project's purpose and need and would compromise the ability of federal agencies to recover the razorback sucker population by allowing the continued degradation and eventual loss of an important rearing area. Alternative C would maintain the rearing area but, due to more difficult access issues, would result in greater collateral impacts to other natural resources than would Alternative B.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING

Mitigation measures are specific actions designed to reduce, minimize, or eliminate impacts of alternatives and to protect Lake Mead NRA resources and visitors. Monitoring activities are actions to be implemented during or following project implementation to assess levels of impact. The following measures will be implemented as part of the Selected Action.

Mitigation Measures

Resource Area	Mitigation Measures	Responsible Party
Geology, Soils, and Vegetation	A resource advisor from NPS will be on site to monitor the transport of equipment into and out of the project area. This will ensure that the equipment follows the designated route to the project site and that there is no undue impact to resources on the ground.	NPS
	Prior to beginning the project, all heavy equipment will be thoroughly pressure washed to remove foreign soil and vegetative matter; this will ensure that non-native plants are not introduced to the project area.	Contractor
	Equipment will be inspected daily to ensure there are no leaks of petroleum products or other hazardous materials.	Contractor
	Best management practices will be in place during refueling and other activities that may release hazardous materials into the environment. A hazardous spill plan will be developed prior to beginning the project.	Contractor
	To minimize ground disturbance, heavy equipment will be restricted to one mobilization into Yuma Cove and one demobilization out of the park.	Contractor
	Heavy equipment will be parked in previously disturbed areas designated by NPS; no new staging areas will be created.	Contractor, NPS
Visual Resources	Following the completion of the project, all portions of the route used to transport equipment that are not part of a public road system will be sufficiently restored to prevent unauthorized use.	Contractor, NPS
Safety and Visitor Use and Experience	The work will be conducted on weekdays (Monday to Friday) to minimize inconveniences to park visitors, who use the lake in greater numbers on weekends.	Contractor

WHY THE SELECTED ACTION WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The NPS used the NEPA criteria to evaluate whether the selected action will have a significant impact on the environment. As defined by 40 CFR 1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

1. Impacts that may have both beneficial and adverse aspects and which on balance may be beneficial, but that may still have significant adverse impacts which require analysis in an environmental impact statement:

No significant adverse impacts were identified that will require further analysis in an environmental impact statement.

2. The degree to which public health and safety are affected:

No significant adverse impacts to public health and safety were identified.

3. Any unique characteristics of the area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains:

No wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains are located within the project area. No cultural resources were identified during surveys of the project areas. There will be no unacceptable impacts and no impairment to cultural resources.

4. The degree to which impacts are likely to be highly controversial:

There were no highly controversial impacts identified during preparation of the EA or the public review period.

5. The degree to which the potential impacts are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

No highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks were identified during the preparation of the environmental assessment or the public review period.

6. Whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:

No significant adverse impacts were identified during preparation of the EA. Implementation of the selected action neither establishes a NPS precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions that may have individual insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant effects:

The EA analyzed impacts to geology and soils, vegetation, wildlife, special status species, water quality, air quality, soundscapes, visual resources, park operations, and safety and visitor use and experience. As described in the EA, cumulative impacts were determined by combining the impacts of the selected action with identified impacts from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects and actions.

Although the access route to Yuma Cove has undergone restoration treatment, this area has been previously disturbed. The re-use of this route for administrative purposes will have only minor impacts to geology, soils, vegetation, wildlife, and visual resources. These impacts will not contribute significantly to the cumulative effects of off-road disturbances within Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect historic properties in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other significant scientific, archeological, or cultural resources:

No cultural resources, historic properties, or historic viewsheds were identified in the project area; therefore there would be no unacceptable impacts to cultural resources.

9. The degree to which an action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat:

Implementation of the selected action will have a beneficial affect the razorback sucker. Rehabilitation of the rearing pond will allow the razorback augmentation program to continue to operate at its current capacity. Since no other federally protected species occur in the project area, there will be no adverse effects to threatened or endangered species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:

The Selected Action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. The EA for Repair of Yuma Cove Razorback Sucker Rearing Pond was prepared using the guidelines detailed in *NPS Management Policies 2006*, and the Selected Action meets all NPS requirements.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY CONSULTATION

Scoping

A press release announcing a 30-day public scoping period for the Repair of Yuma Cove Razorback Sucker Rearing Pond Environmental Assessment was issued to area media on May 23, 2010. The press release was also posted on the park website, at the Cottonwood Cove ranger station, and at the Alan Bible Visitors Center. One comment was received from the Nevada Department of Wildlife expressing concern about the lowering of the lake level and how it may interfere with the rearing of trout in net pens at the Willow Beach Fish Hatchery. However, the lake level will be maintained at 633 feet to allow for normal hatchery and concession operations.

Agency Consultation

The construction, operation, and maintenance of the razorback rearing ponds on Lake Mohave is addressed in Reclamation's Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program and covered in the Biological Opinion issued for that Program by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 4, 2005. No additional consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is required. Reclamation will obtain a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to

beginning maintenance on the berm. Any stipulations listed in this permit are incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Significant Impact.

Public Review and Comments

On August 11, 2010, a press release announcing a 30-day public review period for the environmental assessment was sent to television stations, newspapers, magazines, and radio stations in Las Vegas, Henderson, Boulder City, Pahrump, Overton, Logandale, Laughlin, Nevada; Meadview, Kingman, Phoenix, and Bullhead City, Arizona; and Needles and Los Angeles, CA. The press release was also posted on the Lake Mead NRA internet website, on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) internet website, at the Cottonwood Cove ranger station, and at the Alan Bible Visitors Center.

Lake Mead NRA's mailing list is comprised of 235 federal, state, and local agencies; individuals; businesses; and organizations. The environmental assessment was distributed to 30 individuals, agencies, and organizations likely to have an interest in this project. Entities on the park mailing list that did not receive a copy of the environmental assessment received a letter notifying them of its availability and methods of accessing the document.

The environmental assessment was published on the Lake Mead NRA internet website at (<http://www.nps.gov/lame>) and on the NPS PEPC internet website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. Copies of the environmental assessment were available at area libraries, including: Boulder City Library, Clark County Community College (North Las Vegas), Clark County Library, Las Vegas Public Library, Green Valley Library (Henderson), James I. Gibson Library (Henderson), Sahara West Library (Las Vegas), Mohave County Library (Kingman, AZ), Sunrise Public Library (Las Vegas), University of Arizona Library (Tucson, AZ), University of Nevada Las Vegas James R. Dickinson Library, Meadview Community Library, Moapa Valley Library (Overton, NV), Mesquite Library, Mohave County Library (Lake Havasu City, AZ), Laughlin Library, Searchlight Library, and Washington County Library (St. George, UT).

The public comment period closed on September 7, 2010. One comment was received from the Las Vegas office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, concurring with the park's preferred alternative as written.

IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES OR VALUES

The implementation of the selected action will not constitute an impairment of Lake Mead NRA resources or values. Impacts documented in the EA and summarized above will not affect resources or values key to the natural and cultural integrity of the park, or alter opportunities for the enjoyment of the park. The selected action will not impair Lake Mead NRA resources and will not violate the National Park Service Organic Act. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the impacts described in the EA, and the professional judgment of the decision maker, in accordance with *NPS Management Policies 2006*. As described in the EA, implementation of the selected action will not result in major adverse impacts to a resource or value whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of Lake Mead NRA, (2) key to the natural or cultural

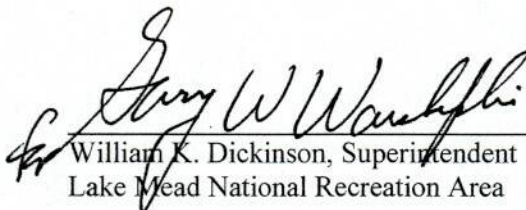
integrity of Lake Mead NRA, or (3) identified as a goal in Lake Mead NRA's *General Management Plan* or other relevant NPS planning documents.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis completed in the EA, the capability of the mitigation measures to reduce, avoid, or eliminate impacts, and with due consideration of minimal public response, the National Park Service determined that the Selected Action does not constitute an action that normally requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement.


Negative environmental impacts that could occur are minor in effect. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, known ethnographic resources, or other unique characteristics of the region. There are no significant impacts to the affected environment. There are no highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence identified. Implementation of the action would not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for this project, and the Selected Action may be implemented as soon as practicable.

Recommended:


William K. Dickinson, Superintendent
Lake Mead National Recreation Area

9/15/10
Date

Approved:


Christine Lehnertz, Regional Director
Pacific West Region

09/23/2010
Date